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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 6656
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9320
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 5179
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 1287
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 2547
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003778

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI ARMY COMMANDER TELLS AMBASSADOR MILITARY DID
NOT INFLUENCE FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT

REF: A. BANGKOK 3756
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3648
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 3618
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 3191
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 2619

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda told the Ambassador December 22 that he had not influenced the formation of the new government. Self-interest and the opportunity to gain political power had led the Newin Chidchob political faction and other politicians to split with Thaksin Shinawatra loyalists and join the Democrats in setting up the new ruling coalition. The Army Commander decried actions taken by both sides of the political divide during the recent months of conflict and said that Thai law had handicapped efforts by security forces to control protesters. Anupong claimed that Army leadership was united in the opinion that military involvement in the political system would be counter-productive to resolving the political conflict. The Thai deployment to Darfur as part of UNAMID should occur in April-May, once the new government reviewed deployment plans.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Notwithstanding many press reports to the contrary, Anupong continues to stand firm in his insistence that the Army has not and should not become a player in the political discord that has ailed Thailand since mid-year. The Army Commander has faced down intense pressure from a wide range of actors, including reportedly from elements associated with the monarchy (Privy Counselor Siddhi and the Queen - see refs D and E), who have publicly and privately called for the Army to overtly take a side in the political conflict. With Anupong expected to remain as Army Commander until October 2009 or 2010, depending on the decision of the government, we will continue to engage him, reinforcing his stated policy that the Army should remain outside politics. End Summary and Comment.

ARMY COMMANDER DENIES HE INFLUENCED FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT

[1](#)3. (C) During a December 22 social engagement with the Ambassador, Royal Thai Army (RTA) Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paochinda denied that he had influenced the formation of the Democrat-led coalition government. Anupong strongly denounced reports based on rumors that he had played a

critical role in persuading Newin Chidchob to break with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and to direct his faction of former People's Power Party (PPP) legislators to join the Democrats in the new government (Refs A and C). Newin had been looking for an opportunity to break away from the former PPP, and had used alleged influence from the Army as an excuse to make the break at this time, Anupong stated. Politicians' self-interest and the anticipated opportunities to benefit from ministerial positions were the key factors in the Newin faction's decision to assist the formation of the Abhisit Vejjajiva government.

14. (C) Claiming that politicians were not disposed to listen to him, General Anupong told the Ambassador of an attempt to influence the political environment after former Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej declared a state of emergency in the aftermath of the September 2 seizure of Government House by People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) protesters. The Army Commander said he had called Banharn Silpa-archa, then leader of the now dissolved Chart Thai party, to ask him to break away from the PPP-led coalition. Banharn had dismissed the request and Anupong claimed that he had made no further attempts to influence politics after the rebuff. (note: a former Chat Thai minister told us December 19 that Chat Thai was prepared to break from the PPP after the outbreak of violence October 7, but was waiting for the independent commission report before doing so).

RTA GENERALS CONFIDENT PM ABHISIT WILL SUCCEED

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15. (C) General Anupong and General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the RTA Chief of Staff who also joined the social engagement, both expressed confidence that Prime Minister Abhisit would do a "good job" as leader of the government. Both generals indicated that they thought the Democrats would lead the government for an extended period of time. In contrast, Anupong opined that if Puea Thai had formed the government, it would have been out within six months.

ARMY COMMANDER EQUALLY CRITICAL OF YELLOWS AND REDS

16. (C) General Anupong criticized both yellow-shirted PAD supporters and red-shirted United Front for Democracy (UDD) supporters. The two sides' actions during recent months had greatly hurt Thailand, Anupong said. As someone born under the Libra astrological sign, Anupong said he had pursued a middle course that supported resolving the political conflict through justice and the democratic system. Anupong said he was very confident that, despite faults in the Thai legal system, the top five to seven PAD leaders would be prosecuted within six months for their actions during the past months of protests.

17. (C) Referencing the late-November airport seizures by the PAD, Anupong said he had objected to the pleas that had been made by the UDD and by PPP politicians for the Army to clear PAD supporters from Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang. The Army had no legal authority to remove the protesters; instead the Royal Thai Police was the responsible entity to conduct such an operation, Anupong maintained.

18. (C) Anupong noted that in comparison to legal systems in the West and in other Asian nations, Thai law gave protesters too many rights. As such, it was difficult for security forces to exercise control of protesters. The Army Commander said that in his opinion, police forces in the U.S. would have the legal authority and the popular support to use force to conduct clearance operations if protesters tried to take over a government facility or a transportation hub.

WORRIED ABOUT NEW YEAR HOLIDAY VIOLENCE

¶9. (C) Anupong told the Ambassador that he had not planned any travel during the New Year holiday because he expected that "red shirts" or their hired agents would carry out a bombing or bombings that would be similar to those conducted on New Year's Eve in post-coup 2006 (Ref A). The Army Commander said he believed that the 2006 New Year's Eve violence had been organized by pro-Thaksin elements who had hired people from the "mid-South" with expertise in bomb making to conduct the bombings.

ARMY LEADERSHIP UNITED

¶11. (C) The Army Commander dismissed any suggestion of a split within the top ranks of the RTA. Anupong said the Army's course of action during the recent months of political conflict - support for the rule of law and resolution of the political conflict through the democratic process - was a consensus view of the RTA. Despite rumors to the contrary, senior Army leadership was united in the opinion that military involvement in politics, such as a coup or a crackdown on the PAD, would have set back resolution of the political divide.

THAI MILITARY PREPARING FOR UNAMID DEPLOYMENT

¶12. (SBU) Anupong told the Ambassador that the Thai military was preparing for deployment to Darfur with a target date of April or May. RTA leadership believed that the new government should be given the opportunity to review the proposed deployment, but the pledge would not have to be approved by Parliament.

JOHN